

know a number of my colleagues are joining us in that effort. We have all asked the appropriators to increase NIH, to help the Department of Defense in their work on breast cancer research, so nobody is being left out of the loop.

So again I urge people to disregard some of the stories they see on those issues and continue to work for all Americans who are suffering with us today.

VOICES AGAINST VIOLENCE CONFERENCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California (Mrs. CAPPS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. CAPPS. Madam Speaker, I rise this evening in great anticipation of next week's Voices Against Violence Teen Conference. The conference is a unique opportunity for Congress to listen to our Nation's youth. In our efforts to understand our young people and to curtail the violence which surrounds them all too often, we sometimes forget to consult the teenagers themselves. This is a mistake. It is time for us to learn from them.

When applications for this conference were distributed in my district, I thought there would be some interest, but I was simply overwhelmed by the response. It was tough deciding on the three teenagers to send to Washington, so I decided to form a Youth Advisory Council in my district. This council made up of all the applicants will advise the three delegates on their trip to the conference.

Our first Advisory Council meeting was held this past Monday. Students came from across my district, from Paso Robles to Santa Barbara. Some drove for 2 hours to have their opinions and feelings heard. The discussions were riveting and moving. It was fascinating to hear their views on the causes of youth and violence from young people themselves. Family was the focus. More than anything, these students see a strong home environment as the key to happier, better adjusted children and reduced violence.

Young people need to rely on their parents. They need to be able to communicate with their family members. They also cited peer and academic pressures, violence in the media, socioeconomic circumstances and discrimination as root causes of youth violence. Drugs and alcohol are also seen as contributing factors. Gun safety issues and gang pressures are certainly a part of their lives.

We discussed a range of solutions from metal detectors to school counseling to hot lines to recreational programs. Students raised the idea of having closed campuses on their high schools, limiting the ability of students to leave the building throughout

the day. I was astounded to hear that some of the students do not think that closed campuses are realistic because they are too crowded.

One described his high school which houses 3100 students although it was built for 1800. I had not really thought of the school construction efforts here in Congress as being linked to school violence, but these students showed me that that link is very much a reality.

In more emotional moments we heard from a brave young woman who talked about her personal and triumphant battle with drugs, a habit which had been spurred on by the drug use and addiction of her parents. Another young woman recounted the fatal stabbing of her boyfriend on school grounds. She spoke with the deceased young man's mother sitting close by her side.

These are stories that we in Congress must hear and keep with us as we sort out our legislative options.

Madam Speaker, it is time for us to start listening to the students. Their insight can help us to understand the roots of today's violence and what we can do to help them stop it. I am so pleased that I will be able to welcome Cheyrl Villapania from El Puente High School in Santa Barbara, Stacie Pollock from Righetti High School in Santa Maria, and Brandon Tuman from Arroyo Grande High School in San Luis Obispo County. They are going to travel across the country next week to attend our conference, and I also commend their chaperone, Raquel Lopez, from Girls Incorporated in Santa Barbara. These capable young people will be the eyes and ears of our Youth Advisory Council here in Washington D.C. They will bring the concerns of the young people from the 22nd District of California to the conference and then report back to our youth and to our community on what they have accomplished. I am proud of them for taking the initiative, for making their voices heard on issues that are important to them, important to us all.

As important as our work here is in the capital, we know that the real work of reducing violence that surrounds our young people is going to come from within the communities themselves. Voices Against Violence conference is an excellent step in the right direction. I commend the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. GEPHARDT) and his staff for their leadership in organizing this conference. I look forward to welcoming to the capital next week students from the central coast of California and from around the country.

HATE CRIMES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of the Hate Crime Prevention Act, and I strongly urge the Commerce-State-Justice conferees to include this important legislation in their conference report.

Since I was first elected to Congress, I have been focusing on the issues of livable communities, how we can create better partnerships between the Federal Government, State and local governments, private business and individual citizens to make our communities more livable. This means, in sum, communities that are safe, healthy and economically secure. If people are not safe from discrimination, the community is definitely not livable.

I have been a strong supporter of anti-discrimination efforts throughout my public service career. As a member of the Oregon State House of Representatives way back in 1973 I had an eye opening experience when I had the opportunity to chair the legislature's first hearing on the issue of gay rights. The Hate Crimes Prevention Act is an excellent opportunity for the Federal Government to continue a trend over the last 50 years of moving aggressively to deal with issues of anti-discrimination.

Since 1969, the Federal Government has had the ability to prosecute hate crimes if that crime was motivated by bias based on race, religion, national origin or color and if that victim was attempting to exercise a federally protected right. The law has, in fact, proven to be a valuable tool in the fight against hate crimes, but unfortunately these hate crimes are still a part of the American landscape, and sometimes the language of the current federal statute is simply too narrowly drawn. The Hate Crimes Prevention Act would make a critical amendment to the law, removing the requirement that the activity be, quote, federally protected and adds sexual orientation, gender and disability as covered categories.

As I said, there are still hate crimes among us. In 1997 there were over 8,000 that were reported.

I have had the opportunity to witness firsthand that there are real faces attached to those statistics. One of the most searing experiences in our community occurred about 10 years ago when three Ethiopian immigrants were attacked in my hometown of Portland, Oregon, one beaten to death solely because of the color of their skin. I think our hearts all went out to the families of the victims, but there were more victims than the immediate family.

Sadly I was acquainted with a family of one of the people, the skin heads, who were convicted of that murder, a young man who will spend the rest of his life behind bars, tearing up his family, and indeed the whole community was touched with the awful knowledge that something of that nature could occur in our midst.